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Ramadan and Fireflies

Rekindling the spirit of this blessed month

By Huma Ahmad

The Prophet said, "When the month of Ramadan begins, the gates of Paradise are opened and the gates of (Hell) Fire are closed and the devils are chained." (Bukhari)

With fantastic imagery, this hadith informs allMuslims that the month of Ramadan is a special month unlike others. During Ramadan, which falls in February of this year, Muslims all over the world will join together and strive to worship Allah.

One way in which many will consciously try to improve their Islam during the month is through prayer, since there are rewards and invocations for doing so.

For example, Abu Hurairra relates that the Prophet said, "Whoever establishes prayers during the nights of Ramadan out of sincere faith and hoping to attain Allah's rewards, all his past sins will be forgiven."

From Dawn to Sunset

Muslims will also fast during the month from dawn to sunset.

"Oh you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye many learn piety and righousness" (Qur'an, 2:183)

Allah adds,

"...And it is better for you that ye fast, if ye only knew." (Qur'an 2:184)

Indeed the benefits of fasting are many. We learn Taqwa (God-consciousness) and self-restraint, we know what it is to feel hunger and deprivation, we unknowingly increase our health as doctors have proven and so on. .

Not just fasting

Ramadan, though, is not just about fasting and praying in and of themselves. These are the first steps in trying to purify one's soul and increasing one's *Imaan* (faith and belief), which is the real goal. Forgetting school or work problems, and concentrating on oneself and improving one's relationship with Allah is the true purpose.

"Ramadan is the (month) in which the Qur'an was sent down, as a guide to mankind and a clear guidance and judgement (so that mankind will distinguish from right and wrong).." (Qur'an 2:183)

We actively learn this right and wrong by controlling our thoughts, speech, behavior and by avoiding evil. Each Muslim, along with praying and fasting, must also refrain from hurting others, swearing, taking in harmful things, etc.

Along with being a strong personal religion for the individual, Islam is also practical and designed for the people as a whole to satisfy their needs and promote happiness.

This is why Muslims pray the *Taraweeh* prayers in congregation and Mosques hold special community dinners inviting everyone, and why the Day of Eid is so special.

You can feel the love of Allah between Muslims all through the month. Nowhere is brotherhood so much a part of worship. If you visit the mosques late at night during Ramadan and see all the devoted people standing together praying to the Almighty, you would never have cause to doubt the power of Islam.

Unfortunate Deviations

Unfortunately though, we sometimes deviate from the true meanings. The designation of the first day of Ramadan is argued upon endlessly by different groups, to the extent that Muslims in the same community will start fasting on different days and thus celebrate Eid at different times. We ignore the Quranic injunction to,

"...hold fast all together, by the rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be notdivided amongst yourselves." (Qur'an, 3:103)

Iftiar dinners also divide the communities. There are the 'Pakistani' Iftars, the 'Arab' Iftars, etc., new Muslims and young members of the community, such as college students, are often excluded. At community dinners those who don't come to the mosque regularly just sit and watch the various cliques and contribute only 'Salaams'.

We should remember all the Muslims and remember the true purpose of these events we hold.

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations andtribes, that ye may know each other." (Qur'an 49:13)

Our culture is Islam first. Let us not forget this and wipe out any kind of racism or prejudice that exists within ourselves.

Ramadan, as opposed to something that divides, can even be used as an effective *da'wah* tool for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. An atmosphere of warmth, food and piety can truly go a long way!

Catching Fireflies

When the long-awaited Eid arrives, it is almost always celebrated by everyone in the community. Mostly it is a joyous time of celebration and thankfulness. But Eid too can deviate into a display of fashions and cars.

For a few Muslims it is the only occasion they come to the mosque (except for the other Eid) and it is looked upon as a ritual duty. The Eid Khutbah is rarely heard as people leave or get up to socialize.

In growing up, Ramadan was a time when all the Muslims in our community would come together and share Islam. We would play outside after the dinners and even try to catch fireflies for each other.

We would marvel at these little sparkling bugs together, one of Allah's most fascinating creations.

The True Spirit

Perhaps somewhere along the way we have lost this true remembrance of Allah (swt) in all that we do. The need to learn about Islam and to strive has been lost to culture, *bid'ah* (innovations in religion) and straying.

Communities need to recognize these problems and develop effective target solutions for them. They are not residual effects, but are symptoms of growing problems that will get worse.

Would we be following Islam as we do if the Prophet, peace be upon him, was with us today? As a community or as individuals? Would we spend Ramadan in the same way if we knew it was our last (*Audhu'billah*)? Would so many of us remain ignorant of our deen and our own souls? Or would we ask forgiveness and start again?

May Allah forgive us and guide us all. Ameen.

"When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them); I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me; let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me; that they may walk in the right way."
(Qur'an 2:188)

Huma Ahmed is a second year CompSci student at SUNY in Albany, NY. She is active in the MSA.

Trinidad High Court Rules in Favor of Hijab

The High Court of Trinidad and Tobago, an island nation in the Caribbean, ruled on January 17 in favor of an 11-year-old Muslim school girl barred from attending a state-supported Catholic school because she wanted to wear a head scarf (*hijab*).

The ruling allows the girl to attend the Holy Name Convent wearing a modified version of the school uniform that includes hijab. Judge Margot Warner also stated that three-quarters of the girl's legal expenses should be paid by the respondents. The girl's father said he is pleased with the outcome of the case. A lawyer for the school said he would appeal the decision.

The conflict, which caused the girl to miss several months of schooling, began September 5 when the government-supported religious school boards in Trinidad issued a statement barring Muslim students from wearing *hijab*. In her ruling, judge Warner said the school boards "used their power without reason."

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Alarming Growth of Women's Oppression

By Katherine Bullock

With the first gusts of winter wind, a startling change seems to have overcome Canadian women: one day they are walking around enjoying their freedom, the next they are oppressed! What has led me to make this unsettling conclusion?

Well, I see they have all started to cover their hair. In fact, the situation must be worse for some women; they are covering their faces as well. I can only guess as to how local Canadians are filled with unease at these latest developments.

We all know that freedom is a rare commodity these days, and no one likes to see it being undermined by the way women dress. I decided to do some empirical research to determine the cause of the beginning of women's oppression in Toronto.

"Why are you covering your hair?" was my first obvious question. The women answered with remarkable consistency. They gave answers which varied from "To keep my head warm," to

"The weatherman said it would be really cold today, so I'm covering my head."

Clever Socialisation

Such answers offer firm proof of women's subjection through a clever form of socialisation. We all know that it is not necessary to cover one's head to be warm, indeed all one needs is a long sleeved coat and long pants or skirt. As to the poor women who said it was thanks to the weatherman, we can only shake our heads with pity.

It's distressing to observe that they believe in the weathermen, who are simply using the predictable patriarchal tool of complicated weather language to keep women in their place.

We must help enpower these women by teaching them to distinguish between patriarchy's use of language, and the reality of weather.

We can only speculate about how far this sad trend amongst Canadian women will take them away from true freedom. We have an extreme example of what could happen without our concerted action in Muslim women who are forced to cover their heads by patriarchal definitions of religion.

If we start trying to combat it now we should be able to nip in the bud before spring.

Katherine Bullock is a grad student at U of Toronto.

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Lack of Vision and Planning

"There can be no implementation of Islam without Organization"

By Wael Haddara

One of the great dilemmas facing Muslim communities and organizations today is related to organizational solvency

By solvency I mean the fact that few such organizations have clear vision or understanding of the path they need to take in order to reach their goals. In some instances, the goals themselves are not clear

I find this strange in Muslims, of all people. We have occupied ourselves with the less important to the detriment of the more important We have spent inordinate amounts of time and energy in ensuring that we have ornate mosques and Islamically resounding titles such as *Majlis al-Shura* and *Amir*. Sometimes we have made a concession to the environment we live in which can be seen in designations such as *Vice-Amir*.

Vision: Why?

But the problem remains that, not only do we not have vision, but we lack an understanding of what vision is or the need for it

Al-Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad Al-Sadiq is said to have made the following observation: "Allah (swt) has created us for a certain purpose, and He has required from us certain matters. Why He has created us is hidden from us What He requires from us, He has made known to us. So why is it that we are more occupied with what He hid from us, than what He made known to us?"

The point of the observation, of course, is that Islam has given us clear direction and clear guidelines as to what we should strive for in this life Yet there are those who set aside the pursuit of these goals to indulge in matters which are largely irrelevant. The example given was the purpose of the Creation, but there are numerous other examples The point remains that Allah *subhanahu wa ta'ala* has given us clear directives in the Qur'an that we should follow.

We all say that Allah (swt) has sent down the Qur'an as the Final Revelation. However, our perspective of the Qur'an differs dramatically when it comes to understanding what it means. Some Muslims view the notion of "vision" as an intrusive concept alien to Islam. Some laugh at the mention of the need for a mission statement.

Our Prophet's Planning

Yet, when we look at the life of the Prophet (saw), we find that it progressed along very clear lines. He did not hesitate, nor did he equivocate at any point in time. He proceeded with sure-footed steps during his entire life until he passed away

"But," some will say, "The Prophet (saw) was inspired. Allah (swt) revealed to him"

And we will say "Exactly!" This revelation that the Prophet (saw) received is with us today. The challenge is for us to understand it in its proper light

In Surat Al-Hajj, we find this all encompassing vision for Muslims:

"O you who believe bow down, prostrate yourselves and worship your Lord, and do good deeds that you may be successful. And strive in His cause as best as should be (with sincerity and under discipline). He has chosen and had imposed no difficulties on you in religion; it is the religion of your father Ibrahim. It is he who has named you Muslims, both before, and in this revelation; That the Prophet may be a witness for you and you be witnesses for humanity. So establish regular prayers, give of your wealth in charity, and hold fast to Allah! He is your Protector - the best to protect and the best to help." (Al-Hajj: 77-78)

What We Must Do

These two verses contain in their few words what is required from Muslims in all aspects of their lives They contain references to the worship of Allah (swt) as the prerequisite to all other things; the duty devolving upon the Muslim to serve and do good to others; the importance of making all effort in the path of Allah (swt) and the conditions for it; the perspective of Islam on humanity and our descent from the Father of the Prophets (as); the task of the Muslim community being witnesses unto humanity and the sources of guidance that are essential for the community to achieve that status; lastly, an affirmation of the all-important notion that there will be no success in any affair unless the sincere belief and worship of Allah (swt) is at its base.

These verses summarize the Vision, the Mission Statement and the Plan of the Muslim individual and community.

Implicit in these verses are the following points. the need for the Muslim community to ensure a process for educating Muslims and raising faith and awareness such that they match the requirements described both at the beginning and the end of the verses with respect to sincerity in worship.

This may seem rather intuitive. But in fact, we have seen in North America that it is not After more than thirty years of continued Muslim presence in this continent, we have no overarching mechanism for educating our youth and no method of evaluating the effectiveness of whatever scattered educational efforts there are This does not mean that no efforts were made, but that whatever efforts were undertaken have not achieved their desired results.

We continue to see a crisis in commitment to Islam and Islamic behaviour not only amongst the broad Muslim community, but also within our very mosques and organizations. In other words, amongst those who are most committed.

There is an admonition to "do good." Islam is undoubtedly the epitome of all good But until recently (and in many instances this is still the case), our activities as Muslim communities have been restricted to building mosques, holding lectures, organizing Sunday schools and social dinners. The world suffers from untold miseries – poverty, disease, ignorance, violence and a myriad of social ills. Once more, we have been unable to understand our responsibility to our fellow humans, Muslims and non-Muslims, and translate that understanding into action.

I will discuss only one other item from the verses - the call to strive in the Cause of Allah (swt) with sincerity and under discipline. There can be no real implementation of Islam, in all seriousness, without organization It is clear now to all who are active in Islamic work that simply raising the banner of "Islam" is insufficient for unity.

When all is said and done, there are varying understandings of the requirements of Islam and the goals and objectives of the Muslims. This lack of agreement on such issues is, I believe, at the root of dissension and difficulties in our mosques and organizations.

We need, therefore, to establish a vision for the Muslim community. We need to recognize the difference and disparities amongst Muslims today, and evolve a vision that is able to rise above these differences and bring Muslims together under the shade of the Qur'an and Sunnah in true understanding.

"Now we have brought to them The Word in order that they may be reminded." (Al-Qassas: 51)

Wael Haddara is at Queen's, in Kingston, Ontario. He is Vice-President (Canada) of MSA National.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

A Handful of Water

Reflections on Waste & Behavior

By Faraz Rabbani

In an authentic saying of the Prophet, recorded in Imam Muslim's *Sahih*, it is narrated by Anas that, "The Prophet used to make wudu' with a *madd* (of water) and made *ghusl* with up to five *madds*." A *madd* is that the amount of water that two hands cupped together contain

Think about this The Prophet made wudu with a handful of water. He made *ghusl* with *up to* five handfuls Think about this And then think about what we do. The taps open, the water gushing out and splashing everywhere. Is this the practice of the Prophet, of whom we are told by Allah,

"You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern of (conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day and who engages much in the praise of Allah." (Surah Ahzab, 33: 21)

Surely not.

Waste

The hadith gives us insight on the importance of using what we have properly, without waste This sort of behavior awakes in us a consciousness of what we have been bestowed by Allah By not wasting what we have, we can realize how much we have We would then see how little others have. How little other Muslims have

We might then discharge our duties as Muslims and use that which we have in the way of Allah Instead of wasting our money on our petty addictions, we might give it in charity to alleviate the suffering of people all over the world

We also waste time very well. Unlike the tap whose water flow seems endless, our lives are short They will end, and we have no idea when.

We say we are busy We say we don't have time to help out in the community or in campus activities. We are busy Sorry, we can't come to the study circle We are busy. Busy doing what? We gossip endlessly, we watch endless, inane television programs. We are busy.

Surely, we need to evaluate where we spend our money, where we spend our time. Are we expending any of it in ways pleasing to Allah, in ways conducive to our own good in this life and the Hereafter?

Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said it very well: "Take yourselves to account, before Allah takes you to Account." Change yourself, behavior, before you are questioned about it.

Behavior

The sight of someone doing their wudu in a typical North American washroom, with water gushing and splashing isn't pretty. Imagine if a non-Muslim is watching this. Imagine if a marginally committed Muslim is watching this They aren't going to be impressed.

On the other hand, if someone does their wudu properly, following all the steps, but not wasting water, not making a mess and taking to clean up after the wudu, the effect is significantly different

This extends to other spheres of our lives too. If we say that we are doing *da'wah*, inviting people to Islam, but our behaviors don't reflect Islamic principles, then do we realistically think that people will be inspired by us to pursue the path of Islam?

With Muslims too, this is the case. After some Jumas, it is very disappointing to see that as soon as the *salah* is over, people rush out as if the building is on fire. Pushing, shoving and bad manners are often witnessed. Someone who comes to Juma only infrequently might well be turned off Islam by such actions

But do we care? Are we conscious of what we do? Do we evaluate ourselves? Or are we simply "blind, deaf, and dumb" to our reality?

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The Muslim Voice seeks to present Muslim perspectives on issues of concern to students The majority of the articles are written by and for university students

The Muslim Voice is published by the Muslim Students' Association at the University of Toronto and distributed across North America It seeks to present Muslim perspectives on issues of concern to all of us

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...That is Your Help to Him

Helping Each Other in Righteousness

By Raneem Azzam

It used to be that most of the Muslim teenagers with whom I was acquainted were either Muslims by name only, or what I will term *part-time Muslims*. Suddenly, I have found myself surrounded by many devout young Muslims, Alhamdulillah. It is not enough to be solitary pious Muslims, however. We must truly be an Ummah and to do so we must overcome potential divisions.

I will not talk about the ethnic differences that have divided Muslims, nor will I discuss the other problems of disunity to which we customarily refer. My worry is that Muslims are too critical of one another and, thus, we are dividing ourselves further.

Rather than saying "Masha'Allah" when our brothers' or sisters' actions are pleasing to Allah, we focus on those things that they may be doing wrong. We do it both to individuals and to groups of Muslims. We judge them and we condemn them. We even do it to our Imams when we do not agree with their opinions.

Help your brother...

Anas ibn Malik related that Rasulallah (peace be upon him) said:

"Help your brother whether he is doing wrong or whether he is being wronged." A man said, 'Messenger of Allah! I can help him when he is being wronged but how can I help him when he is doing wrong?' And he replied:

'By preventing him from doing wrong. That is your help to him.'

(Bukhari, Muslim)

Most of us realize that we must not sit idly by when our fellow Muslims have gone astray. Yet the majority of us have one of two reactions when our brothers or sisters are not following Islam correctly: we either think badly of them or we disassociate ourselves from them entirely. At the same time, however, we give da'wah to non-Muslims using gentle and compassionate words.

Why can we not do the same for Muslims who are misguided?

Obviously, the way to help Muslims find true Islam will depend on understanding their circumstances. The easiest scenario would be when we know that our brothers and sisters are generally pious and are committing an error out of ignorance. In such a case we can simply inform them and they will likely be grateful for the assistance.

It becomes a little more difficult when our brothers or sisters are generally not following Islam closely. In such a situation, although we may be inclined to speak to them harshly, we must try to guide them with clemency.

Condemning

Condemning people does not help them or prevent them from doing wrong. Our obligation as Muslims is to talk to people with kindness. We should invite our brothers and sisters to follow Islam properly rather than cursing them when they do not. It is important to remember that most people become extremely stubborn when they are put on the defensive. Furthermore, we are only human ourselves and it is possible that we are completely misjudging people.

Sometimes we think that someone is being negligent of their Islam but in reality they is at the point of trying to make changes. To give a concrete example of someone in that position, I, like many Muslim women, do not yet wear hijab. I feel like there is something missing from my deen without it and I intend to wear it, Insha-Allah. It does not help me to be told that I am wrong because I will never deny that. I have many apprehensions about wearing hijab and, of course, they are all very trivial when compared with pleasing Allah. Just when I think I am ready to do it, I think of a new reason not to.

There is not a great deal people can do to help a woman with this decision. In my case, however, whenever I receive words of encouragement from sisters who wear it or those who intend to, their words chip away at my reservations.

It is in our best interest to give the most effective da'wah to our brothers and sisters in Islam. Instead of pushing them away, we must give them a tug in the right direction. Alienating them with abrasive words will not have any positive effect.

Allah's Mercy

Those Muslims who feel that they are following Islam properly must remember that it is only through Allah's Mercy. They must also remember that being strong individually is only the first step and that the good of the Ummah should be a further goal. A strong sense of community is crucial to both the Muslims who are on the right track and those who are still trying to find the Straight Path. As members of a community we must each guide not chide. "...That is your help to him."

Let us give it hand instead of the finger.

Raneem Azzam is a 2nd year student at the University of Toronto. She is the twin of Mostafa Azzam.

Silent Communication

Brotherhood on the bus

By Mostafa Azzam

I had been standing on the bus and as I turned I noticed a man's hand extended to shake mine. Smiling pleasantly, he shook my hand and brought his up to his chest. From that gesture my hunch that he was a brother was confirmed so I wished him salaam and he muttered something back. I assume it was a reciprocation of the greeting, but I wasn't able to make it out.

I'm not sure how he knew I was Muslim, maybe it was my ring, or maybe he noticed the *Message* magazine sticking out of my coat pocket or maybe he had noticed me at the mosque. However he may have known I was Muslim, to him I was a brother and we attempted to converse. And I stress the word "attempted". I couldn't figure out whether he was deaf and dumb or completely unfamiliar with English but our only means of communicating were hand gestures and only a couple of isolated words.

We held somewhat of a dialogue but despite both our efforts we hardly understood each other. He showed me a video he had bought, gave it a thumbs up and uttered the word "da'wah". I tended to just nod and smile because I didn't know how to talk to him.

This brother and I could hardly communicate with each other but I felt a closeness to him that I lack with many people with whom I can communicate perfectly. The experience was a very good reminder that brotherhood lies only in a mutual submission to Allah.

Moose, Raneem's twin brother, is still roaming U of Toronto, while pretending to study 2nd year Saence.

Don't judge others unduly

Keep your nose down: the importance of attitude

By Taras Hollyer

It was a typical Friday afternoon at the Masjid. Jumma prayer had just let out. Groups of Muslims, dressed in their finest Islamic clothing were talking together in tiny groups, enjoying the summer afternoon.

Cheerfully, a young man steps out of the masjid. Although it is hot outside, he is dressed in a black leather jacket, black baggy pants and a dark shirt. His baseball cap is worn backwards, and his sunglasses are perched over his eyebrows. He had just heard what he had felt to be the best Khutbah in his life.

Contemplating Change

Although his ties to his faith were tenuous at best, the Khutbah caused him to think more deeply about who he was. Maybe, he thought, he would go to the study circle at the Masjid tonight rather than to a movie with his school friends.

As he makes his way down the stairs towards his parent's car, a ripple of silence passes through the crowds of the 'pious'. Some break off their conversations to stare coolly at the young man. "Look at *that*," some say, "Here we are struggling to keep this Masjid open. And for what? *How?* He dresses like a gangster."

What is he doing here?

Immediately the noses of the 'pious' snap up to the sky in rejection of his presence. The young man becomes only too aware of this and the newly lit fire inside him cools, perhaps forever.

"O believers, people shall not scorn others, for perhaps they are better than them." (Qur'an, Surah al-Hujurat, 49 11)

Ironically, two young men, neither of them Muslim, are seated in the Masjid. They are listening to a few people tell them about Islam. Although one of them enthusiastically listens, the other one becomes bored and acts rudely to demonstrate this fact. After all, they are only here because of a school project.

Unfazed, the 'pious' continue to happily explain their faith, noses pointed to the ground in humbleness. No comment is made of their 'gangster' dress, although one of them wears a shirt praising marijuana.

"As to the one who considers himself self-sufficient, to him you attend. Though there is no blame on you if he does not increase in purity. As to the one who comes to you earnestly with fear (in his heart), From him you are distracted." (Qur'an 80:5-10)

Picking at Faults

I have seen this scene play itself out before my eyes too many times. Muslims jumping on Muslims rediscovering their faith for even the smallest of faults. I have often commented to myself wryly: "How many of those fingers pointed by 'pious' men have gold rings on them?" Astonishingly, a lot of them do.

Although the bulk of sincere Muslims are indeed patient and tolerant of people's shortcomings, the problem of character assassination of weaker Muslims by those who would hold themselves up as 'pious' is still a problem that hinders the healthy development of a strong community.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, once said: "Whoever cover up the faults of a fellow Muslim, Allah will cover his faults on the Day of Judgement" (At-Tirmidhi, hadith 1152)

We should heed these words and heed them well, for if Muslims cannot gently instruct each other in the Deen, then how can we expect to instruct those who accept Islam? Indeed, we have to be kind rather than cruel; inform rather than deform those who genuinely don't know any better. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Call to the path of your Lord in wisdom and mild exhortation. Reason with them in a courteous manner. Your Lord knows best those who stray from His path and those who are rightly guided." (26 214 219)

Wisdom and Good Words

It is therefore imperative to heed these words, both as members of Muslim associations and as individual believers, especially on the campuses of this country, where Muslims are present. If we do not make

(Continued on page 6)

A Muslim Student's Role

By Shireen Ahmed

Representatives of various MSA's from across Ontario met on January 1st, at Erindale College to discuss a number of issues. We were fortunate enough to have Faisal (Abu Jihad) Abdur-Razzak speak to us that evening.

His talk began with the hadith of the Prophet, peace be upon him, which states:

"Take advantage of five things before five others happen: your youth before you grow old; your health before you fall sick; your money before you become poor; your leisure before you become busy; and your life before you die."

He continued by emphasizing that in discussing the MSA, we must realize that it is a means towards an end but not an end unto itself. An organization like the MSA becomes a source of commitment and loyalty for many students, but sometimes we forget the message behind it, the message of Islam. As one works for theMSA, our state of *iman* (faith and belief) can improve and, in turn, create a greater sense of devotion towards striving for the cause of Allah.

Cultural Differences

Brother Faisal then challenged the concept of cultural differences. Islam represents a broad range of fundamental principles and has never condemned cultural practices. It is natural for Muslims to gravitate to the group they feel most comfortable with. Differences do not have to be negative. In fact, they can be used to strengthen one another.

However, we should practice brotherhood by not treating other Muslims differently even if they are in a different 'group'. An MSA is an Islamic organization in which all Muslims must work together to produce good Muslims.

The Importance of Students

A third point in the lecture was the importance of students. Students represent the future leadership of an ummah. After we graduate, we set the direction for the ummah, whether we accept it or not.

The ideals of Islam will only be implemented if people strive for them. If you passionately believe in an idea, you would do anything to labor for it. For example, people demonstrating against abortion would be willing to go to jail in the name of their cause. We need to be committed to who and what we are and then live it.

Be the best Muslim you can be, because we need the strength of the Muslim individual. We also need strength from the Muslim home and family. For many students, Islam is not really established in their homes, although that is where it is needed most. Parents should encourage their children to play a strong role in the MSA, realizing that it would be best for them. If the family is a strong unit in this society, the community will be even stronger, insha'Allah.

Key Concepts: A Frame of Reference

Brother Faisal closed with ten key concepts for a frame of reference or a guide for students:

1. Have an understanding of Islam
2. Have a sincerity of purpose
3. Take decisive action
4. Struggle (*Jihad*)
5. Sacrifice
6. Be obedient
7. Be steadfast
8. Have discipline and maintain focus
9. Brotherhood
10. Trust

Overall, the Muslim students' role is to increase their state of Islam, which would benefit themselves and those around them. Insha'Allah, if we all take steps like these, our vision for the future will be promising.

Shireen Ahmed is with MSA U Toronto (Erindale) and organized the MSA Inter-Ontario Meeting in January.

Ramadan, A Month Long Training

Building Our Conciousness of Allah Through Fasting

By Parvez Ahmad

Fasting in the month of Ramadan is a pillar of Islam and an obligatory duty for Muslims. Allah has given the order for fasting in Ramadan in the Qur'an in Suralth Al-Baqara 183. O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you, as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may make *taqwa*

184 (Fasting) for a fixed number of days; But, if any of you is ill or on a journey, then, the prescribed number of days (should be made up) later. For those who can do it (with hardship) is a ransom, the feeding of one who is indigent, but he that will give more, out of his free will, it is better for him. And it is better for you that you fast, if you only knew.

185. Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide to mankind, also as clear (signs) for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong). So, everyone of you who is present during that month should make fasting, but, if any of you is sick or travelling, the prescribed period should be made up by days later. Allah wants to make things easy for you; he does no want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period. And to glorify Him in that He has guided you. And perchance you shall be grateful.

186 When my servants ask you about Me; I am indeed close (to them); I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on me, that they may walk in the right way

187 Permitted to you, on the nights of the fasts, is the approach to your wives. They are your garments, and you are their garments. Allah knows what you used to do secretly among yourselves, but , He turned to you and forgave you. So now associate with them, seeking what Allah ordained for you. And eat and drink, until the white thread of the dawn appear distinct to you from the black thread. Then complete your fasts till the night appears; but do not associate with your wives while you are in "retreat" in the mosques. Those are the Limits of Allah, do not approach near them. Thus, Allah makes His Signs clear to men; that they may practise *taqwa*. (Surahh Baqara, 2-183-187)

Abu Hurairah narrates that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said "Many people who fast get nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst, and many people who pray at night get nothing but wakefulness" (narrated in Darimi)

Abu Hurairah also narrates that Prophet Muhammad said: "If a person does not avoid vain talking and false conduct during seeyam then Allah does not care whether he abstains from food and drink or not". (Bukhari, Muslim)

Failing to derive the maximum benefits from the month of Ramadan out of carelessness and absentmindedness is a sheer loss for Muslims

What is the Objective of Fasting?

Taqwa

It appears from a careful reading of the Quran that the objective of all Islamic "ibadaat" is to earn "taqwa" . objective of fasting is taqwa (2:183; 2:187); objective of Quranic guidance is taqwa-makers (2:2); objective of zakaat" is taqwa (7 156; 4:77); objective of "hajj" is taqwa (2:196).

What is the Meaning of Taqwa?

According to Abdullah Abbas Nadvi, the "taqwa" has several meanings: being everconscious of Allah, always aware of God, alert about Allah, having self-control, protection, abstinence from evil action, fear, fear of Allah, etc. Taqwa is that human quality of power which protects a man from evil.

What is the Benefit of Taqwa?

According to the Quran, the God-conscious (*Muttaqeen*) are guaranteed to get: Allah's love (3:76; 9:4; 9:7), Allah's proximity and protection (2:194; 9:36), Allah's friendship (6:51, 45.19); "Furaka" (7:96), ability to distinguish between right and wrong (8:269) and paradise (3:133; 15:45; 44:51; 50:31; 26:90)

How to Earn Taqwa.

(1) By doing our acts of worship (*Ibadaat*) and remembrance (*Dhikr*) correctly, with full attention and humility (2:238; 29:45; 23:1; 23:9; 6:92; 70:34; 57:16);

(2) By remembering the Hereafter and death (20:102-104; 39:69-70; 79:40-41; 99:1-8);

(3) By loving Allah and respecting His signs; by reading the Quran with *tadabbur* and acting upon it. (2:121; 38:29);

(4) By satisfying our natural instincts in a halal way within the limits set by Allah (2:187; 2:229-230; 4:13; 59:4; 65:1);

(5) By choosing our friends correctly (9:119; 6:52; 6:70). By avoiding peer-pressure and ignoring negative environments.

9:119 says: O believers! Make taqwa and be with the truthful.

Hadiths: On being asked whom to choose for making friends, the Prophet (SAW) said: "Make friends with such persons who remind you of Allah" (Bukhari). And "A person tends to follow the faith of his friend, so be careful who you make friends with" (Tirmidhi).

(6) By taking our religion seriously (6:70).

(7) By making fervent duas and seeking the protection of Allah (25:74).

(8) By reading the Quran with understanding (2:121; 38:29).

A Month-Long Training Camp.

Ramadan may be regarded as a month-long army training camp, wherein two types of training are imparted: External and internal. The external training is the physiological training in regulating food an drink and changing the eating schedules

The internal training is the main objective of fasting. This may be examined in 6 parts:

(1) Control of the Tongue:

Let us consider some Hadith on this point:

(1) "He who believes in Allah and the Hereafter should talk what is good or keep quiet" (Bukhari and Ahmad).

(2) "Whoever can guarantee the chastity of what is between his two jaw bones (tongue) and what is between his two thighs (private parts), I guarantee Paradise for him." (Bukhari).

(3) "To achieve salvation, control your tongue, confine yourself to your house and reflect over your sins." (Tirmidhi).

(4) "A believer does not taunt or curse or abuse or talk indecently." (Tirmidhi).

(5) "A man slips more by the tongue than by the foot." (Baihaqi).

(6) "The worst man is he who backbites and causes disruption among friends. Those who indulge in gossips and tattles are the worst people among the believers." (Ahmad).

Control of the tongue is a must for believers; let us practise this in the coming Ramadan and onwards in the future.

(2) What we Hear:

Surahh Mulk 67.23 : "Say it is He who has created you and given you hearing, sight and feeling in the heart. But alas! you express little gratitude."

Surah Bani Isra'il 17:36 : "And pursue not that which you have no knowledge; for every act of hearing, of seeing or (of feeling in) the heart will be questioned about (in the Day of Reckoning)."

Note the interesting order : ears first, followed by the eyes and heart. (Recent knowledge in Embryology on the order of formation of organs: ears formed complete first in the embryo).

Islam teaches its followers not only to refrain from speaking useless words or backbite but also not to hear evil and backbiting by others.

(3) Training of the Eyes (sight):

Looking at haram things (for example, staring intently at members of the opposite sex) is not allowed in Islam "An accidental first glance is permissable; but turn your eyes away immediately." (Muslim) "Do not look at an unknown woman for the second time, for a while you are not to blame for the first glance, you have no right to the second " (Abu Daud and Tirmidhi).

In the event of such happening, say . *"A'oozu-bul-laahi-minash-shai'taanir-rajeem"* (I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the accursed). Surah Nur 24:30-31 orders Muslim men and women to lower their gaze in presence of the members of the opposite gender and not to look directly at each other. Surah Araf 7:179 tell us that eyes and ears have been given to humans for using them correctly without being heedless about Allah's limits. Surah Furqan 25:43-44 warns humans about passions and impulses.

(4) The Whole Body:

Some Muslims have a misconception of fasting and they go into a state of semi-hibernation spending the whole day in bed. Some wake up for salaat, but then return to sleep or lie down immediately after the salaat. Some others become cranky and short-tempered while fasting. Ramadan is really a time for increased spiritual activity and self-control. Reading the Quran with understanding is highly recommended.

(5) Iftar and Food:

Breaking the fast must be done on time and with halal food. "Break your fast with dates, or else with water, for it is pure." (Abu-Daud and Tirmidhi). "Take the pre-dawn (*suhur*) meal for there is blessing in it" (Bukhari and Muslim).

(6) Dua-Maq-bool:

It is narrated by Abdullah ibn Umar that the Prophet said : "At the time of Iftar, the duas of the fasting person are accepted" Just before Iftar, while waiting with wudu for the time of sunset, make "duas";

"Allahumma-inneka-'afoowwun-tuhibb-ul-'afwa-fa'fe-anee." (O Allah! You are the Forgiver; You love forgiveness; so forgive me).

Make Iftar (break the fast) with this dua;

"Alla-humma-laka-soom-tu-wa-'ala-riz-qika-af-tor-tu" (O Allah! It is for You that I observe fasting and it is with Your blessings that I break it).

"There are two occasions of joy for one who fasts; one when he breaks the fast and the other when he will meet his Lord."

"A believer is a person who first fulfils Allah's orders and then starts to worry about any shortcomings; and then seeks forgiveness from Allah." So, let us turn this Ramadan an occasion for earning the forgiveness of Allah and the cleansing of our past sins.

It should be noted that there are two things that Allah claimed to be his own : one is the Kaaba an the other is *siyam* (fasting).

In a Hadith-Qudsi narrated by Abu-Hurairah, the Prophet said: "Allah the Majestic and Exalted said : Every good deed of man will receive ten to seven hundred times reward, except seeyam, for it is for Me and I shall reward it as I like." (Muslim).

So let us try our best to fast properly; and Allah shall keep his promise.

May Allah forgive me if I made any mistakes, shortcomings or excesses in preparing this write-up. Ameen

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Insaan Foundation

Teaching Infant Workers in Pakistan

By Qaiser Ahmad

Many of us living in the West believe that children in developing countries are *forced* into child labour.

During the Summer of 1994, the International Development and Refugee Foundation (IDRF) launched its first excursion program, with 8 students, including myself, to Pakistan. Our base was Lahore, and from there we visited various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to understand the issues facing the society.

The NGO that had the greatest impact on my mind was the Insaan Foundation. *Insaan* means people. This NGO worked with infant workers in the populous slums of Lahore. These slums lack all basic facilities: health care is virtually inexistent, and the open, overflowing sanitation systems carry disease better than they carry refuse. Here live the poor of a typical developing country, neglected by the government.

We love this design

We saw many kids in this slum, often working in garages and electrical stores for a pittance. We were not surprised, because we expected to see the children of poor families working, since government cannot, or rather will not, provide social assistance.

Insaan Foundation

Then we got to the Insaan Foundation and spoke to the people running it. They were special individuals who have dedicated their lives to helping children. We heard shocking things.

We were told that often it was the children who chose to work instead of going to school. We didn't quite believe them. This contradicted all that we had read in books. We are told that child labour exists because families are poor. But we were told by the Insaan Foundation that there was another reason, and they showed us what it was.

They took us to a place where working children are taught what they *need* to know. Walking by open, putrid sanitation dumps and open sewers, we came to the so-called school. It was a house, and the roof-top had many kids sitting on straw mats, looking attentively at the blackboard. We had interrupted a class in session.

The teacher realized this and stopped. Suddenly, one of the boys stood up and asked a question, "You people [us] come to our homes to see how we live. You take pictures and leave. What is the purpose of your coming here? How will it *make a difference*?" We were amazed by this 15 year-old's question.

We explained how we would try to raise funds through IDRF in conjunction with other youth groups. That is what we could do for them, besides creating an awareness of their situation.

One of the members of Insaan asked the students to explain why they attend such a school instead of going to 'normal' schools? Hands shot up, but the boy who had asked us the question before quickly jumped up and started talking.

He said that they attend class from 6 am to 7:30 am; then they go to work till night time, often till 9 pm. Then, they come back to class from 9:30 pm to 11:30 pm. He said that he earned 5 rupees (25 cents) a day, but his boss gave him lunch and dinner. Twenty-five cents. What can you buy for 25 cents, even in Pakistan?

The boy then told us about his work. He had been working from the age of 7, repairing electrical appliances then automobiles. At the age of 9, an angry boss hit him on the head with a metal pipe, leaving a long scar. He left the job and has since worked for six years fixing bikes.

The Schooling Problem

He then explained why he had left school. And this is the ***big problem***. Because his family was not rich, he could not afford a private school where he could be educated in a good environment. So he had attended a public school where the teachers didn't care. No help was provided and no real attempt was made to *teach* students. The teachers would get mad if questions were asked. Kids were punished for mistakes and mischief. In short, the public schools in his area were terrible.

Change

How can this change? The government 'cannot' provide more money for education. Yet they have money to spend on the military, or on 60 Mercedes sedans for politicians. The politicians are rich, often landowners with vested interests in keeping people illiterate...

The class then presented a skit on physical abuse in the workplace, a common occurrence. A kid asked again, "What can you do for us?" He was talking about the abuse...

We returned to the Insaan Foundation's office. I could not but notice on the way that there were no lights on the roads; potholes, and waste abounded on the muddy street. The Insaan members explained that they were talking with employers about not beating the kids, and have even taken steps to see that physical abuse in the schools is stopped.

Alhamdulilah, things are slowly changing. Initially, some employers were against the kids' education, but they slowly understood and appreciated the need to educate the kids.

I asked how Insaan managed to convince the children to attend school at night, after a long day of work? It was a matter of approach. They maintain that the kids enjoy coming: the teachers give them attention, communicate positively and involve them in the learning. They relate the subjects with the children's' lives. They ask the kids what they would *like* to do, and structure activities around that. Looking back, the children *liked* going to school, even after a long, grueling day of work.

What did we see from this? Talented children, with potential for more than working as underlings in garages, were being educated, so that they could one day unleash their potential.

How we can help

How can we help? We can't effect dramatic changes on a socio-economic level. But there are things we can do. They need money: Money to keep NGOs such as Insaan open. NGOs that really spend money where it is needed. Money to keep the children in 'school', to educate them, and provide them with books.

Every little bit helps. Not only in Pakistan, but around the world. Allah has blessed us by providing us with the countless luxuries We can help. In a way, we must, as Muslims.

It is narrated in *Sahih* Bukhari that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "The good deeds are made easy for the blessed, and bad deeds are made easy for the wretched." Then he recited the Verses: "As for him who gives (in charity) and is Allah-fearing And believes in the Best reward from Allah." (92.5-6)

Qaiser Ahmad is a 3rd year Toxicology student at U of Toronto. He is an all-around good bro and IDRF Volunteer.

Developing our Muslim Identity in North America

By Nusheen Ameenuddin

The question took me by surprise. I was giving a lecture on Islam to the Cultural and Ethnic Awareness class at my old high school. I had no trouble answering questions about hijab, prayer, and other aspects of Islam, but this particular question stumped me.

"Well, no...not exactly." I responded, unsure of how to tackle the question because although I faced it everyday, I had never taken the time to answer it for myself.

Western society is all that many Muslim American youth have known. From a young age, we have been taught that, as Muslims, we are in some ways different from our Western surroundings. This was a fact that I accepted without question. Contrary to what many of my non-Muslim friends thought, I never felt deprived, because Islam gave me so much.

Now that I look back, I realize how important that question is to all Muslim youth living in the West. It is not so much a matter of being trapped somewhere against our will. Rather, it is a question of who we are and what we are prepared to do about it.

Islamic Character

Throughout history, there are numerous examples of Muslims who resisted assimilation and remained true to their Islamic character. Our beloved Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, remained untainted by the corrupt surroundings of a pagan society.

More recently, we have witnessed how the Muslims of Chechnya maintained their Islam for several decades despite living under the cloak of Communism. Examples like these demonstrate that it is possible to live Islam wherever we are. Remembering this helps us to live in the West without succumbing to its enchanted lifestyle.

The challenge that we, as Muslim youth, face involves coming to terms with the Western world and our Islamic lives. Although we struggle to live Islamically, we cannot ignore our surroundings. For if we lock ourselves up in our communities, we will have no defense when it comes to facing the world. Because even if we do not seek out the world, it will undoubtedly come to us.

Identity: Beyond Superficial Manifestations

In addressing this problem, I have found that a majority of Muslims stress a sense of Islamic identity among youth. I agree that this is a step in the right direction, but by no means is it the complete answer. It is not enough to wear "I love Islam" caps or even to say that we are proud to be Muslims. This concept must be taken a step further to where we understand what it means to live as Muslims.

The first step in understanding is to develop an Islamic outlook that makes Islamic values central to our identity with a deep remembrance of Islamic habits and behaviors. Through understanding comes wisdom. And it is critical to have wisdom with knowledge, because what good is information if you do not know how to use it in the best way?

Once this level of understanding is reached, the implementation can begin. Tariq bin Ziyad serves as an excellent example of how Islam can be implemented in the Western world. When he and his Muslim forces landed on the shores of Spain at Jabal Tariq (later Anglicized to 'Rock of Gibraltar'), only 92 years after the Prophet's Hijrah, in 711, they intended to stay.

Knowing this, I wonder if they ever felt the threat of becoming westernized because of their surroundings. Quite the contrary, the Muslims impacted on western society and Islamicized them!

Today, the inevitable task of implementing Islam has fallen on the shoulders of the Muslim youth of North America. The youth have been catapulted into a position where they face the dilemma of Islamization versus Westernization. First of all, it is important to develop a vision for the Ummah. This begins with the family and spirals upward to the community level and ultimately the world.

The Cyberspace

One frontier that can serve to link up the Ummah is cyberspace, or the Internet. We may ask ourselves if cyberspace is the means by which we can revitalize the Islamic way of life. I firmly believe that the Internet can be used to organize a society based on Qur'anic principles. We already see Islamic news and discussion groups that connect Muslims all over the world. This is a prime way to reach out to our brothers and sisters and galvanize us into an active citizenship in the Ummah, thus strengthening us individually and collectively as well as preserving our Islamic heritage and ideals.

We Muslim youth must take advantage of our resources, capitalize on what the West has offered us by putting it to Islamic use. The task of implementing Islam in North America without being absorbed by Western society appears daunting. But history has shown us that it can be done, by the Grace of Allah (swt), if we mold ourselves into Mu'mins and combine our faith, knowledge, and wisdom with right action.

All good is from Allah (swt) and all mistakes are my own.

Nusheen Ameenuddin is a first year student at Kansas State University. She is on the editorial staff of The Muslim Voice.

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Muslims and Islamic Manners

Learning Manners through Islamic Rituals

By Jawad Ahmed

There is a need for humanity to learn proper ethics and its characteristics in order to transform society. The only solution to this need is Islam and the manners it instills.

Part I:

Learning Islamic Manners

First, let us reflect upon how we can learn Islamic manners through the Islamic rituals. Before we actually look into the details of Islamic ethics and manners, let us see how directly they are related to belief. Islamic manners instill belief in one's heart.

Allah says in the Qur'an:

"It is not piety (*Al-Birr*) that you turn your faces towards the east or west (in prayers), but *Al-Birr* is (the quality of) the one who believes in:

1 Allah (swt)
2 The Last Day
3 The Angels
4 The Book
5 The Prophets
6 Who gives his wealth, in spite of love for it, to
 i. The kinsfolk
 ii. The orphans
 iii. The poor who beg
 iv The wayfarer
 v Those who ask
 vi The captives
7 Who establishes regular prayers
8 Who practices regular charity
9 Who fulfills the contracts he makes
10 Who is patient and firm in:
 i. extreme poverty
 ii. ailment
 iii. throughout all periods of panic

Such are the people of the truth, the pious (*Al-Muttaqun*)." [Surah Baqarah, 177]

One can see from this verse that righteousness and piety involve not only belief in Allah (swt) and accountability, but also the acts of worship like prayer and charity. It further explains that a Muslim is faithful to his or her commitments and is patient in times of difficulty. Thus, this verse illustrates that the character of a believer has three basic elements:

1. One's belief in Allah (swt) and hence accountability
2. One's acts of worship, exemplified here by prayer and charity which strengthen belief
3. One's behavior during times of trial, which result in the fruits of belief

The Qur'an repeatedly describes the believers as, "Those who believe and do good deeds."

Firm belief manifests itself naturally through numerous good deeds. These two elements are inseparable and complementary. Belief is the foundation upon which good character is built and a good Muslim develops. If it is weak, only a weak personality may emerge. But if the foundation of belief is strong, then good conduct and behaviour will be exhibited.

Belief increases and decreases under different circumstances. Some days we feel close to Allah and content inside, not because of any material gain or success but because of an inner peace that warms our heart and soul. At other times, we feel desperate, aloof and rejected because we miss Allah (swt)'s light of guidance.

Allah (swt) states this very same concept in the Qur'an.

"Is he who was dead (without faith by ignorance and disbelief) and We gave him life (by knowledge and faith) and set for him a Light (of belief) whereby he can walk amongst men, like him who is in the darkness (of disbelief, polytheism, and hypocrisy) from which he can never come out? Thus it is made fair-seeming to the disbelievers that which they used to do." [Surah An'aam, 122]

Therefore, our duty should be to increase our level of belief, so that we are alive, as the above verse explains. The methodology was shown to us by Allah when He told us to safeguard our prayers, give charity, fast, help each other and do good deeds. These acts of worship bring us closer to Allah (swt). When we think and ponder about Allah (swt), our hearts feel secure and at peace, as Allah(swt) says:

"Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest." [Surah Ar-Ra'ad, 28]

The Prophet (saw) said:

"The example of the one who remembers his Lord (Allah) in comparison to the one who does not remember his Lord, is that of a living creature compared to a dead one."

Belief also has to be confirmed with good deeds. The Prophet (peace be upon him) told us: "Belief is what is settled in your heart and confirmed with your actions." It is easy to give advice to others, but it is much more difficult to practice what you preach, because it may involve hardship, sacrifice and patience.

Allah (swt) rewards us more for good deeds than for good words. When one visits a sick person, goes to the masjid to pray in congregation or goes out of the way to help someone in need, he is rewarded many times over by Allah.

The Prophet (saw) told us: "Among the sins are those which can only be wiped out by striving and working to earn one's livelihood." When one's parents grow old and they live with their children, it should be considered a blessing from Allah, not a burden. If we treat our parents with kindness and love, our reward from Allah will, insha'Allah, be Paradise. When we do good deeds and help each other, society becomes a better place. Words may be pleasing, but their effects and value are usually transient.

Part II:

Manners and the Real Muslim

The reason for referring to a "real" Muslim is to differentiate between two types of Muslims. There is one type are those who faithfully obey each order to the best of their ability. They will, if Allah wills, follow the path prescribed by Allah. Then, there are those who just call themselves Muslims. In name, and appearance they are Muslims; yet their practices are lackadaisical.

In the Qur'an, one finds the following direct characteristics of a *true* Muslim.

1. Kindness, gentleness, and forbearance
2. Controlling anger and forgiving others
3. Justice and fairness
4. Chastity, purity and modesty
5. Safeguarding oneself and avoiding sins
6. Love for all, hatred for none
7. No insulting
8. No spying or backbiting
9. Piety and God-consciousness (*taqwa*)
10. No thinking evil of others
11. Seeking help from Allah (swt) through prayers and patience
12. Cooperation with everyone and communityhood
13. Obedience
14 Repulsing evil with good
15. Humility
16. Contentment
17. Trustworthiness

It is important that we try our best to instill the above characteristics, because this is one of the major objectives of Islam. As the Prophet, peace a said, "I have been sent to implement and improve good character." He also said, "The closest to me on the Day of Judgement will be those with good character."

And Allah (swt) has said:

"And verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted standard of character." [Surah Al-Qalam, 4]

Kindness, gentleness and forbearance:

Our Prophet (saw) is *the* example of kindness and gentle behaviour. No one can attain that level, but that is not to discourage us from striving, for our own felicity and success. Allah explains why He gave the Prophet such a noble character:

"And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about you..." [Surah Al-Imraan, 159]

It is extremely important to remember that people are attracted to someone who is kind and gentle and are apprehensive about someone who is harsh. This is particularly important for those who are calling others to the way of Allah, whether they are calling Muslims or Non-Muslims.

Unfortunately many Muslims mistakenly assume that when calling others to the way of Allah (swt), kindness and good behaviour is only for the non-Muslims. The common justification is, "We'll he or she is a Muslim and already knows, so he or she has to be told harshly if they are not coming to Allah, whereas non-Muslims are new to the concept so we have to explain to them with kindness and gentleness."

One should remember that Islam does not have double-standards. The importance of character is clear and the same for everyone, Muslim or Non-Muslim.

When calling others toward Allah, wisdom lies in the approach, as we are told by Allah in the verse above. For example, if I had a dinner at my house and invited everyone in the neighborhood in a rude, distasteful manner, would anyone bother to come?

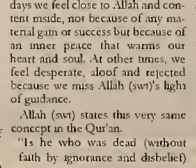
Calling others to this *deen* can be compared to that dinner invitation. Until we show the good character of a kind, gentle, forbearing person, people will not bother to think about Islam. This directly relates to the society in which we live.

Knowing that our surroundings are un-Islamic, it behooves us to set an example for others, thus affording the non-Muslims an opportunity to appreciate us more. Needless to say, the consequences of not practising such noble and sublime morals will be grave.

Jawad Ahmed is a regular on MSA-NET, and studies in Maryland.
This is the first in a multi-part series.

Toronto Sister's Gala 1994

By Tanha Nur Akon



A Sister's Gala was hosted by the MSA U of Toronto at the TARIC Mosque on December 24, 1994. All sisters from the community were invited to attend.

The purpose of the Sister's Gala was to foster a sense of community and sisterhood on the basis of our common faith. The sisters managed to create a relaxed atmosphere conducive to making new friendships and renewing old ones. The colour coordination of the decorations and the semi-circular floor plan added to this relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Sisters freely intermingled and chatted about the stories and events of 1994. Naturally, smiles of friendship and warmth were extended by all.

The Islamic greeting was heard in all corners as we welcomed more and more sisters. Our food coordinator, Sophia, arrived and I was relieved. As busy as ever, she quickly arranged all the food on the tables that we had set up earlier. I saw other sisters helping her, and for some reason I felt a surge of happiness.

The afternoon program began with icebreakers which were well received. Then Sadia Baig, the Vice Amira of MSA U of T (St George), gave a talk on the importance of Muslim female activism. The responsibility and role of sisters in community building was emphasized. It was a thought-provoking and serious topic.

After the talk, we prayed Asr. Next, lunch was served. There was a variety of food including delicious dessert. Lunch was, of course, prolonged by socializing with new friends. After lunch, we played a game which most found quite amusing.

The final presentation was a combination of a skit, a cultural dress show and hijab styles. It was organized by Shireen Ahmed (MSA U of T - Erindale). The different modest cultural dresses were from Ethiopia, Pakistan, Palestine, and North Africa. The presentation also included demonstrations of wearing Hijab in different styles.

The multi-cultural audience was delighted by our presentation and that was encouraging. Insha'Allah next time, we will try to add even more variety.

In organizing the Sister's Gala, I had an opportunity to work closely with a number of dedicated sisters. It has made me feel how special sisterhood is and I will certainly treasure this experience. I thank Allah for making the Sister's Gala a success. Perhaps we should have more "Sisters Only" events where we can express our unique Islamic personalities.

"And among his Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: Verily in that are Signs for those who know." (*Quran, 30:22*)

Tanha Nur Akon is Events Coordinator for MSA U of Toronto (St. George).

Noses of the Pious

(continued)

our weaker members feel welcome among us, then they will be made to feel welcome elsewhere, and I for one am not prepared to shoulder the burden of that on the day of Judgement.

To put it more bluntly, although I have heard of people in the Masjid shunning a person with a Rock T-shirt on, I have never heard of people in a bar or discotheque doing so. The fact that these people come to the Masjid in the first place is a sign that their Deen might start burning inside them. Let's try not to extinguish those flames.

" Had you been cruel and hard-hearted, they would have surely deserted you. Therefore, pardon them and implore Allah for forgiveness (Qur'an, 3:159)

Verily Allah has spoken the truth.

Taras Hollyer is a PhD student. Unlike most PhD students, he gets around.

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Islamic Aqeedah (Creed)

Part Three: Elements of Islamic Monotheism

By Shaykh Faisal Abdur-Razzak

3.1 Praise be to Almighty Allah, Lord of the entire universe. In His Hand is the Dominion of the Heavens and the Earth. All Sovereignty belongs to Him, and all Praise is only for Him. He prescribed Laws and what he has decreed is from His wisdom. He does what He wills and commands whatever He wishes. I testify that there is none to be worshipped but Almighty Allah. He is One. He has no partners, and there is none like unto Him. And I testify that Muhammad is His Servant and Messenger; He is the last and Seal of the Prophets, and the best of all creations. May the Peace and Blessings of Almighty Allah be upon him, his family, his companions, and all those who follow him until the Day of Judgement.

3.2 This is the third article in the series dealing with *Aqeedah*, the Islamic Creed. In previous installments we have introduced the subject of *Aqeedah*, mentioned its importance and significance in the life of a Muslim, dealt with basic tenets of Islam and Iman, and introduced some elements of *Tawheed* (belief in One God). This article deals with the Islamic concept of Godhead, and introduces some basic understandings about Allah.

Tawhid:

Islamic Concept of Godhead

3.3 The Holy Qur'an states:

"Say: He is Allah, the One and only; Allah, the Eternal, Everlasting, Absolute; He begets not, Nor is he begotten; And there is none like unto Him." (Surah Al-Ikhlas, 112: 1-4)

And,

"Allah! There is no god but He,

The Living, the Self-Subsisting, Supporter of all; No slumber can seize him, nor sleep. To Him belongs all that is in the Heavens and on earth. Who is there that can intercede with Him, except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is after them, But they comprehend not anything of his knowledge save such as He wills. His Throne encompasses the Heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them, for He is the Most High, the Supreme in Glory." (Surah Baqarah, 2: 255, the famous *Ayat al-Kursi*)

3.4 Allah is the personal name of the One, True God. Nothing else can be called Allah. This name has no plural or gender. This shows its uniqueness when compared with the words which can be made plural (gods), or feminine (goddess). It is interesting to note that Allah is also the personal name of God in Aramaic, the language of Prophet Jesus, peace be upon him.

The One True God is a reflection of the unique concept that Islam associates with Almighty God. To a Muslim, Allah is the Almighty, Creator, and Sustainer of the entire universe. He is similar to nothing and nothing is comparable to Him. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, was asked by the Quraysh people of Makkah about Allah. The answer came directly from Almighty Allah when He revealed a short chapter of the Qur'an which is considered the essence of *Tawhid*, the motto of monotheism. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; The Eternal, Everlasting, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He Begotten; And there is none like unto Him."

There are those who allege that, in Islam, Allah is a stern, harsh and cruel God. He is not loving and kind. But nothing can be farther from the truth. It is enough to know that, with the exception of one, each of the 114 chapters of the Qur'an begins with the verses, "In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful." The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said: "Allah is more loving and kinder than a mother to her dear child."

3.5 But Allah is also Just. Hence, evildoers and sinners must have their share of punishment, and the righteous ones will receive His bounties and favours. Actually, Allah's attribute of Mercy has full manifestation in His attribute of Justice. Good people who make sacrifices throughout their lives for His sake, and evil people who commit transgressions should not receive similar treatment from their Lord. Expecting similar treatment for them would amount to negating the very belief in the accountability of humanity in the Hereafter, and thereby negate all the incentives for a moral and virtuous life in this world. Thus, the good people must be rewarded and evil people will be punished. This is the only logical and just action. The Qur'an is very clear in stating this principle:

"Verily, for the Righteous Believers are gardens of delight, in the Presence of their Lord. Shall We then treat the people of faith like the people of sin? What is the matter with you? How judge you (like that)?" (68. 34-36)

3.6 Islam rejects the characterization of Allah in any human form, or depiction Him as favouring certain individuals or nations on the basis of wealth, power or race. He created human beings as equals. They may distinguish themselves and receive His favours through virtue, piety and righteousness.

3.7 The concept that Allah rested on the seventh day after creating the world, or that Allah wronged with one of His soldiers, or that Allah is an envious plotter against humanity, or that Allah is incarnate in any human being, are all considered blasphemy from the Islamic point of view.

3.8 The unique usage of Allah as the personal name of Almighty God is a reflection of Islam's emphasis on the purity of belief in the absolute Oneness of Allah, and this is the essence of the Message of all the Prophets of Allah. Because of this fervently uncompromising principle, Islam considers associating any deity or personality with Allah as deadly, destructive sin which is unforgivable by Allah, despite the fact that He may forgive all other sins.

3.9 The Creator must be of different nature of things created because it He is of the same nature as they are, He will be temporal and therefore need a maker. It follows that nothing is like Him. If the Maker is not temporal, then He must be Eternal, and if He is Eternal, He cannot be caused. And if nothing caused Him to come into existence, nothing outside Him causes Him to exist. Thus, He must be Self-Sufficient. And if He does not depend on anything for the continuance of His own existence, then this existence can never end. The Creator, Allah, is therefore Eternal and Everlasting:

"He is the first and the last."

Allah is the Self-Sufficient and Self-Subsistent, or, to use the Qu'ranic term, *Al-Qayyum*. Allah, the Creator, does not create only in the sense of bringing things into being; He also preserves them, and takes them out of existence, and is the ultimate cause of whatever happens to them.

3.10 Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Guardian and Disposer of all affairs. To Him belong the keys of the Heavens and the earth; And those who reject the signs of Allah, it is they who will be in loss." (Surah Al-Zumar, 39: 62-63)

Shaykh Faisal Abdur-Razzak is a graduate of the Islamic University of Riyadh. He is an imam in the Toronto region and active in training, education and writing.

Chechnya

A Lesson to Remember

By Mariam Ahmed

A woman holding her child in her arms cries out. Her child is soaked in blood; she cries for help; she cries for someone who can tend to the child. Her cries die amidst the thundering airplanes flying in the sky.

Such are the scenes, powerful enough to bring tears, grief and agony in one's heart. These scenes are not from Bosnia, which has been trashed and forgotten; or from Kashmir, the 'old story'; nor from Palestine, 'the never-ending story.' These scenes are from a land devastated by monstrous murderers. These are scenes that are from war-torn Chechnya.

The Tragedy

Hardly anyone knows about the tragedy in this small land. Those who do know tend to dismiss the matter as being 'hopeless.' But think of those being affected by this war, do they not need our attention?

The people in Chechnya are Muslims who are fighting against the Russian invaders and struggling for their independence. For more than 200 years, Chechen determination has been defiant in the face of Russian tyranny. Yet Russia stubbornly refuses to leave the Muslims in peace.

Since the fighting began more than a month ago, thousands of civilians have either died, lossed their bones or have become refugees. The *Mujahideen* have fought with such determination and power (blessed by Allah) that they have been able to afflict the Russians a great deal. Their leader, President Johar Dawood has stayed his ground, stubbornly refusing to compromise in the bid for Chechen independence.

And we sleep, in peace

While these Muslims fight for Islam, we sleep in darkness. Although the genocide of Bosnian Muslims by the Serbs gained a lot of attention, no *solid* support was provided by either the so-called 'Islamic countries' or Muslims world-wide.

Kashmir and Palestine continue on to be submerged in tragedy, yet have we ever done anything for our brothers and sisters? Have we thought of them? Muslim men, women and children have stand up in the name of Islam, but they are brutally crushed by its enemies.

Why? Because we are asleep, we do not come to their help, we are busy enjoying our lives. Even though we call ourselves Muslims, are we *really* Muslims? How many of us would be willing to sacrifice our lives in Chechyna, Bosnia or Kashmir? How many of us would change ourselves and become true and sincere Muslims, so that if the time of suffering passes over us, we would have the strength to to defend Islam?

To tell you the truth, none of us are ready to face such challenges. We even don't think of things, they often depress us. Sacrificing our needs for the cause of Islam is a reality for every sincere Muslim.

Responding to Terror

Right now, Chechnya is engulfed in terror. If we did not take a lesson from Bosnia, Kashmir or Palestine, is it not wise to analyze the situation in Chechnya and respond to it?

Today the raping of women, the suffering of children and the agony of the old are felt by the Muslim Chechens. Tommorow, such grief and sufferings could afflict us. Who knows?

If they do, how would we react? The Chechen Muslims have, by the grace of Allah, been defiant and have sweared to lay down their lives in the cause of freedom.

Indeed, their actions are a model for us. Their torch bears an eternal light, which will never be extinguished and will continue on to light other torches, Insha'Allah.

Mariam Ahmed is a second year student in the University of Ottawa, and, studying Biology.

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What it Means to Be a Muslim

Towards Building an Islamic Personality

By Mazen Saghir

On January 15th, Sheikh Abdullah Idrees Ali talked about "What it means to be a Muslim."

Sheikh Abdullah Idrees began by saying that to understand what it means to be a Muslim, one has to understand who he or she is in relation to Allah. Being Muslim, he said, means establishing a relationship with Allah based on an understanding of who Allah is, and who we are in relation to Him.

Allah the Creator

Sheikh Idrees said that one of the key attributes of Allah is that He is the Creator of everyone and of everything, and that Allah is capable of doing anything and changing anything. As an example, Sheikh Idrees cited the story of the Prophet Zakaria, who asked Allah for him a child to carry his message after him.

Even though Zakaria was very old, and his wife was old and barren, Allah blessed them with a son, the prophet Yahya. A Muslim should be certain of Allah's ability to do anything and to change anything that He wishes.

Allah the Provider

Another key attribute of Allah is that He is the Provider and the Sustainer, and that He provides us without measure. Sheikh Idrees continued the story of the prophet Zakaria who cared for Maryam, the mother of Jesus, when she was young.

Each time he entered her chamber, he would find food that was out of season. When he asked Maryam where this had come from, she replied that it was from Allah, "for Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure." (3:37)

A Muslim, should fear no one but Allah since one's sustenance (rizq) is provided by Him, and Him alone.

Turning to the role of humans in their relationship with Allah, Sheikh Idrees said that Allah has created us and has given us a status above the rest of creation so we can take care of it. Allah has also subjugated everything for our benefit. Our function as human beings, then, is to worship Allah and to take care of His creation. A Muslim understands his or her purpose in this life, and strives to live according to the Will of Allah and to take care of the trust that He has given us.

Our Choice

Sheikh Idrees also explained that believing in Allah and worshipping Him is a matter of choice, and that Allah has given us the freedom to believe in Him and to live according to His Will. Since we have the freedom of choice, we are also responsible for our own actions and decisions. That is why we are all accountable in front of Allah. A Muslim understands that life is no more than a test, and that in order to pass this test we must direct our thoughts, our intellect, our bodies, our abilities, our energies and our wealth to that which pleases Allah.

Sheikh Idrees said that the choices we make should be based on knowledge, and that before one can make the choice of believing in Allah and adopting Islam as a way of life, one must first study Islam.

In Islam, there is no prohibition against questioning and doubting since these are the mechanisms by which knowledge is acquired. He said that even the prophets had their doubts at one point or the other, and gave the example of the Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) who asked Allah to show him how He gave life to the dead:

"Behold! Abraham said: 'My Lord! Show me how Thou givest life to the dead.' He said: 'Dost thou not Then believe?' He said, 'Yea! but to satisfy My own heart.' He said: 'Take four birds; Tie them (cut them into pieces), Then put a portion of them: On every hill, and call to them: They will come to thee (Flying) with Speed. Then know that Allah Is Exalted in Power, Wise" (2:260)

Developing an Understanding

Even though Ibrahim had complete faith in the power of Allah, he wanted, with the permission of Allah, to satisfy his heart and his mind with an explanation of his faith. Sheikh Idrees said that a Muslim should therefore strive to learn about Islam, and should not be afraid of questions or doubts. He explained that so long as one is *sincerely* seeking knowledge, one will, Insha'Allah, find the answers.

Sheikh Idrees emphasized that Islam is a religion of virtue, and that Muslims are men and women of virtue. A Muslim is one who leads a life of virtue as ordained by Allah in the Qur'an and in the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad. He said that the Prophet was once reported to have said that, "A Muslim is one from whose hand and tongue people are safe." One's tongue and hand can be the source of much harm, including lying, backbiting, spreading falsehood, stealing, and creating mischief.

Our Concerns

A Muslim is one who is always concerned with that which has past and that which has yet to come. A Muslim is one who does not become proud or arrogant, because he or she is constantly asking Allah for the accept their good deeds and for forgiveness of shortcomings.

Sheikh Idrees ended his seminar by saying that the essence of being a Muslim lies in understanding the *Shahada*, the declaration that there is no god but Allah, and that the prophet Muhammad is His messenger. He explained that the *Shahada* is the foundation upon which Islam is built.

Understanding the Declaration of Faith

In declaring it, a person affirms and attests to one's belief in Allah, to one's commitment to worship Him and to live according to His Will.

Among the meanings of the *Shahada* are knowledge of Allah, certainty in Allah, acceptance of Allah's judgements and those of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him); turning to Allah and submitting to Him; honesty with Allah and with one's self; and the commitment to apply the religion for the love of Allah.

A Muslim is one who understands the *Shahada* and lives in accordance with it. Our prayers, our fasting, our *Zakat*, and our *Hajj* do not benefit Allah in any way. Rather, they are manifestations of our faith and our belief in Him, and follow directly from understanding the *Shahada* and committing to live by it.

Mazen Saghir is a PhD student at U of Toronto. He is a past Treasurer for MSA U of T, and is always around.

MSA BASKETBALL... IT'S FAAAAANTASTIC

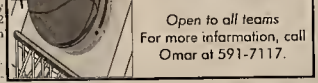
By Omar Islam

Alhamdolillah the 1st All-Ontario Men's Basketball Tournament was held in March 1994 and was a resounding success due in no small part to the outstanding turnout by MSAs across Ontario - over 90 players representing 12 teams from 7 different universities including 2 teams from University of Michigan at Flint and Ann Arbor.

The tournament was held at West Hill Collegiate in Scarborough, which provided us the facilities to run 4 games simultaneously because of the hectic tournament schedule.

Each of the 12 teams played 4 games each in the initial round-robin schedule. After a grueling 6 hours of competition, U of M at Flint were the only unbeaten team (not a big surprise), while University of Western Ontario lost each game by at least 25 points (they should have stayed home!). The top 8 teams were chosen to enter the playoff round and Hizbullah barely qualified, beating out U of M Ann Arbor and U of T Scarborough based on points differential.

The playoffs promised fierce competition right from the start. In an emotional match, the top-ranked University of Michigan was soundly thumped 51-46 by a young but talented Hizbullah team from Madina Masjid in Toronto. U of M made the excuse that they ran out of gas after a long trip from the U.S. the day before, but the general feeling was they were planning the parade route for their expected tournament victory and did not take other teams seriously until it was too late.



By 9 o'clock in the evening, only 2 teams remained. Hizbullah's momentum had carried them all the way to the finals, leaving University of Toronto St. George in the dust.

They faced off against a strong team from the Islamic Foundation Mosque in Toronto. It was a close match between the 2 non-university teams and in the end Islamic Foundation prevailed 43 to 30. Team members were presented with the highly cherished tournament winning medals and choice Islamic books donated by the U of T MSA. Belated congratulations for beating all the highly-ranked university teams.

March Madness II

This year's event, to be held March 18, is being sponsored by the MSA of U of T Scarborough campus. InshaAllah, we will once again get Br. Abdullah Hakim to showcase his dribbling and shooting talents for the U of T St. George team as well as perhaps give us a short talk after Zuhr prayers like last year. And as usual there will be lunch provided and refreshments available throughout the day. Arrangements for accommodations for out of town teams will also be made as needed.

We are looking forward to an even bigger turnout this year (at least 15 teams from 10 campuses). All of last year's teams are invited to register again and hopefully the two teams from my hometown - University of Ottawa and Carleton University (a perennial basketball powerhouse) will be able to attend this year unlike one year ago, when they had to cancel the night before because of difficulty arranging transportation.

I would like to extend special thanks to Br. Abdullah Hakim and to all the volunteer referees and score-keepers, including the chief referee Farrukh Chaudhry for helping make the tournament a success. And last but not least JazakAllah to U of T St. George MSA and Br. Iqbal Ahmed, who worked late into the night on several occasions to get things organized.

By the grace of Allah, many of us made new friends and contacts last March, all in a healthy Islamic environment. Insha'Allah this year's tournament will help to further establish brotherhood and unity amongst the Muslims on our own campuses as well as between campuses throughout Ontario.

Omar Islam is a medical breakthrough at U of Toronto. He is also known as "dumb and dumber".

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